

[Francis Donovan]

[?]

Francis Donovan

Thomaston, Conn.

286 North Main St.

Dear Mr Donovan:

Several of the stories you have sent in are exactly what I want most but the record of how men lived , when they were not working , is still cloudy.

Can you not find one particular informant with an active mind and a sense of proportion who will consent to an interview that will give us more of the personal side of the clockmakers and their lives?

I'd I would like to know more about the reason behind the frequent assertion that "the old times are best." I'd I would like to know what some particular man thinks of the way people used to live and the way they live today. When Seth Thomas ran the store and a man bought everything on tick, did he get more for his money than he does today? Were the groceries in Seth Thomas's store top grade products, was there a wide variety offered, were the prices right, and did the help ever complain when the day of settlement arrived? What does the clock worker think of the chain store, or bottled milk? How does he accept packaged goods rather than bulk? What were the reactions ot to change around the Thomaston area?

The eating habits of a people are important. If the old-timer had pie for breakfast, I'd like to know whether or not he still longs for it. If he ate his fill of ham-and, or bacon-and, does he ring the time clock with as much enthusiasm now that the morning ration is skimpier?

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Those old square dinner pails, what did they carry in them? Did any class of workmen enjoy a higher standard of living than another class? Get your informants to talking about pumpkin pie and the relative merits of white and yellow turnips. Find [?] out what they believed was the best beverage. What was is their attitude toward temperance and do they believe the youngsters today drink more than they did?

Clothing might also furnish a lively topic of conversation. Did the old-timers come to work in overalls? Did they tap their own shoes? Did they get more wear from the old shoes than they do today? How about the dress of the women today as compared with the attire of the shop girl of yesteryear.

And while we are talking about women, you might investigate a man's attitude toward offspring. Does he believe in the large family or does he think it tough enough to make a living by himself? Christenings and wakes might be investigated, church habits, marriages, courtship, and the more intimate and softer side of the informant might be carefully and tactfully investigated, always remembering that he must tell you without being asked directly.

You have accomplished an excellent job on the mechanical side of clockmaking. I now need just a little more on what goes on in the heart of this individual who makes timepieces, or who once made them.

Sincerely yours,

Wm. H. [?]

Tuesday Nov. 29 '38

Mr. William H. Garrigus,

Research Editor

Library of Congress

Federal Writers Project

New Haven

Dear Mr. Garrigus;

Your instructions [?] in regard to the personal life of the old time clockmakers arrived today. I believe I have the ideal subject in George Richmond, some of whose stories I have relayed to you before.

Mr. Richmond's parents were English, but in spite of that he has the most pronounced Yankee dialect of any of the men with whom I have talked, some of his idiom in a few years time will [?] probably be as rare as Chaucer's.

Having got it into his head that I am searching for anecdotes, Mr. Richmond labors mightily to put everything he says into form, but if I can steer him away from this strenuous exertion — to a certain extent only for it has led to several amusing tales, I believe he will unburden himself in precisely the manner which will be most useful.

I have had difficulty also in finding him [?] alone, for with several of his cronies, he haunts the fire house each day, discussing things political and settling the fate of the world in general.

Today, for instance, he was with Mr. Andrew MacCurrie, whom I also questioned but whose Scotch accent is somewhat difficult of interpretation. There are at least half a hundred of these old men, pensioners of the Clock Company, drifting about, at a loss to know what to do with their time.

Work has been their whole life, in many cases, such as Mr. Richmond, who never married, and now that it is taken from them their plight is pathetic. Their faith in the product they helped to manufacture, their pride in its international reputation for dependability, has

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been rudely shaken by new methods of production under which, it is rumored among the oldsters, [?] 'more than half the clocks are stoppers.'

To anyone who knows them, who has grown up among them, as I have, the admission by one of them several weeks ago that if he were buying a clock tomorrow "it would be an Ingraham," is a striking commentary on the bitterness of the feeling toward the new regime.

Inasmuch as you have all the historical background you need, the sketch of the early clockmakers are probably unnecessary and I will discontinue them after tonight unless I receive instructions to the contrary from you. I have enjoyed this assignment immensely and I hope I can obtain from Mr. Richmond or one of the others the remainder of the material you desire.

Yours sincerely,

Frances Donovan